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ABSTRACT

The American environment is a culturally splintered and future-related society, representative of the freedoms, stresses, and acute needs created by a modern life style. The contemporary Native American renaissance in America is a direct response to the technological urban lifestyle that dominates the quality of American life. This resurgence is coming out of the future, not from the past, because the Indian revival is created in the cities and not from the mysticism of desert mountains and plains. Government attempts to assimilate tribal America have worked in the reverse. Hardships of city living, with its human isolation, were met by a renewal of Indian personality. Ethnography has largely dealt with the material shape of culture and now anthropology needs to develop new schemes of culture that give function to the "soft-ware" of ethnic fulfillment--the psychological strengths that offer both fulfillment and renewal. Both retention and resurgence of ethnicity suggest there are powerful needs to fulfill in retaining cultural systems and cultural identity. Ethnicity, retention of the first language, religious ceremonies, and fulfillment can be the very structure of personality or individualism. (AH)

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ENDURING FUNCTIONS OF ETHNICITY

By

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Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Washington, D.C., December 1982).

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ENDURING FUNCTIONS OF ETHNICITY

John Collier

Introduction:

For the past years I have been researching ethnicity in education, centering much of this study on the survival of personality of Native Americans in White education - in government, missionary and public school education. In concluding writing, I sought the insights of my anthropological colleagues to clarify the enduring value of ethnicity. To my surprise, I found the future of ethnicity cloaked in considerable ambiguity. I received some baffling responses! One of my colleagues in anthropology and education suggested that no one had heard of education to support ethnicity. Another anthropologist responded by stating, "Why, John, in another generation the world will all be the same." I accepted this as a facetous answer to avoid discussing this issue. Another friend, warningly suggested that the very issue of non-assimilation was an unacceptable focus of research for government funding agencies. Certainly, the thrust of Americanism is toward assimilating all ethnic differences which also is the historical drive of the federal government's administration of the Native Americans.

In the writings of Gerald Weiss, the author presents the thesis that tribalism is in opposition to statism:

> "There has been a general lack of concern about the fate of the last of the tribal cultures among development experts and even, it appears, among anthropologists themselves . . . The last of the tribal cultures are in serious jeopardy. When they are gone, we will not see their like again. The non-industrialized statal cultures have joined forces with industrialized states to eliminate them. The reason for this lies in the contrasting nature of statal and tribal cultures: the former are larger, more powerful and expansionistic. Tribal cultures, representing an earlier cultural form, are denigrated as 'savage' and viewed as an anachronism in the'modern world.' The statal cultures have exercized their power by dividing all land on this planet among themselves. Looking at a political map of the world, we see that not a square centimeter is set aside as sovereign tribal

> land. That a tribe survives anywhere is taken by the statal cultures as a reproach and an indication of work remaining to be done. This is as true for the Third World where concerted efforts are made to destroy the last vestige of tribalism as a threat to national unity -- as it has been for the Western World. . . One need not be an extreme cultural relativist, however, to argue for the preservation of the remaining tribal cultures: no biologist would claim that evolution in the organic realm makes either necessary or desirable the disappearance of earlier forms, so no anthropologist should be content to remain a passive observer of the extinction of the Tribal World. Yet how uninterested in the fate of tribes, it seems, are anthropologists generally! This appears a queer anomaly, for if anthropologists care not, who will? And if not now, when? There are, to be sure, some concerned anthropolgoists, such as those who have acted to form the Harvard-centered Cultural Survival, Inc. But there has yet to be a commitment of entire national anthropological associations -- their officers and members -- to this pressing task. The anthropological community as a whole has not felt the moral obligation to defend against genocide and ethnocide the tribal peoples whose helpfulness has provided so many anthrpologists wich successful academic careers and anthropology itself with its basic data. The indictment made by Deloria, speaking for his people, still stands: 'Indians have been cursed above all people in history. Indians have anthropologists'" (Weiss 1977:891)

This clearly states that tribal and minority cultures are nationally seen as subversive, to the organized systems of statal organizations, who offer no place for cultural nonconformity. It comes as a surprise, and a shock that this has affected anthropological attitude about the survival of the tribal people. This ambiguity appears to say, that anthropologists' concern for culture rests in the past and not in the future.

Why has anthropology dedicated itself to preserving the record of endangered cultures unless these systems of life and ethnicity would not become critically valuable to modern survival? Or can this ethnography be compared to collecting rare butterflies? I think not! Anthropologists have always expressed the irreparable loss of unique cultures, but what is being lost has rarely been described in terms of modern welfare. When Allan Holberg applied anthropology to the future survival of modern Peruvian Indians, his action research carried out on Hacienda Vicos was questioned as to its having any value to the science of Anthropology.

In 1955, at an American Anthropologist Colloquium on the Vicos applied research, Dr. Robert Redfield introduced Allan Holmberg with these words: "Dr. Allan Holmberg is a great humanitarian in protecting the welfare of Andean Indians, but what does this accomplishment mean for Science?" Holmberg's applied anthropology was directed to recognition and liberation of the largest percent of the population of modern Peru. Holmberg clearly recognized the cultural vitality and special intelligence of the Andean Indian -- which he held superior to the creole and mestizo sub-structure of modern Peru.

I give this history to reveal prejudices that have restricted Anthropology from studies of present and future cultural welfare. Prediction about the extinction of tribal cultures have been dramatically incorrect. Even contemporary anthropology has no explanation for the growing vitality of Hopi and San Domingo cultures. These groups are not fading away, because their religiosity is not limited to equilibria with nature's forces, but can embrace the modern dilemma as well, a flexibility that is consistent with the historical observation of Pueblo Society.

The literature deals with the historical structure and functions of indigenous peoples. But now we need to describe and define the value and function of ethnicity in modern survival. Is there a continued function for ethnicity, now and in the future? An answer requires revising the focus of anthropology from the past, into the present and future.

There must be a critical need for ethnicity, for there is

an apparent resurgence of ethnic culture within North America.

In this paper I will consider the American environment as the most culturally splintered and future-related society, representative of the freedoms and the stresses and acute needs created by a modern life style. America has a contemporary Native American renaissance that is a direct response to the technological urban life style that dominates the quality of American life. Significantly, this resurgence is coming out of the future, not from the past, because the Indian revival is created in the cities and not from the mysticism of desert mountains and plains.

The Eisenhower administration was programmed to carry out the historical function of the federal governement: to finally assimilate tribal America. Many federal efforts have been carried out to this end. This time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs strategized to LOSE the Indians in the depth of cities, by a program of relocation. Ironically, relocation worked in the reverse. The hardships of city living, with its human isolation, were met by a renewal of Indian personality. In the depths of Chicago and Los Angeles, new Indian cultures were manufactured, new music, that was fed back to the reservations on tape cassettes. This emergence offers tangible expression for the future ethnicity of an expanding population of the American Indian.

The basis of this emergence is more understandable in psychiatry and medicine than in anthropology. What drew the relocated Indians back into their ethnicity is the very therapudic approach sought by modern psychotherapists. Statistical surveys of health, reveal that immunity within the ethnic enclave is considerably higher than in the dislocated surrounding societies. But when an individual LEAVES the supporting culture-group, he can become as ill as the larger society.

Alexander H. Leighton was the first medically trained anthropologist to research community health and ethnicity. Leighton, as a physician, psychiatrist and anthropologist, carried out twenty years of research into the psychosomatic illnesses created by rapid technological change among groups of French-Acadian Catholic and English-Canadian Protestant in the maritimes of Canada. Psychiatric illness was

higher among the English than the Acadians. Cultural explanations were clear. English faith was scattered between six splintered Protestant organizations, which in turn divided the communities and created social isolation. The Acadian, orthodox French-Catholic, had integrated communities that supported the welfare of the individual.

So, the relocated Indians banded together to create supportive systems of both community and health.

The significance of the ethnic group's collective function of health is that it rests on the strength of the ethnic organization. Practically, as the dominant society becomes more discouraged and ill, indigenous groups can become stronger. As high as eighty percent of illness in modern society is psychosomatic. Indians may recognize that Western ways and medicine have little means to deal with life's emotional illnesses, whereas Navajo medicine, for example, has diverse ceremonies for illness of both mind and body. Much of the revival of Indian culture has resulted from their sophistication about the health and weakness of the White society.

World-wide, tribal and non-Western peoples may no longer see the white man as superior, which has lately created a reevaluation of Eastern and indigenous cultures.

In turn, the White society is becoming aware of the health knowledge of indigenous peoples. The surviving mystique of "whole being" in the philosophies of the American Indians and the East Indians has been a resource in the rise of wholistic medicine. At the same time, there is also an increasing awareness that Western medicine is largely related to the technology of the body, whereas a high percentage of modern illness is in the breakdown of the psyche. This awareness has created a hospitality to the existence of ethnic medicine and possibly a new value on ethnic diversity. Native Americans are responding to this hospitality and this may be a further stimulus for their own redevelopment.

Ethnography has largely dealt with the material shape of culture and now anthropology needs to develop new schemes of culture that give function to the "soft-ware." of ethnic fulfillment -- the psychological strengths that offer both fulfillment and

renewal. Behavioral science must look into the present and the future of modern survival to answer the question of enduring ethnicity. What are we losing by flattening human diversity? Our solidarity is fractured; we appear to be living in the wreakage of traditional cultures. The settlement of the New World is a history of continual dislocation, that generation after generation, has weakened the personality system of the European immigrant, until today most of our supportive programs come directly from media, remote from the roots of our idnetity. The crest of this "anomie" was in the 1960's, years of crisis after long years of futile war in Southeast Asia. There were mas efforts to recover lost faiths and harmonies. Hippies fled into the remaining wilderness to seek organic renewal, but these modern exiles were not equipped for "natural survival." Commune culture was often chaotic and of short duration. Thriving in nature required broad skills and "general intelligence" capable of dealing with every variable of ecology. Modern peoples no longer need this versatility on a day to day basis, survival today is through <u>specialization</u>. We have developed <u>tunnel intelligence</u>, a brilliant beam of enlightenment that leaves general survival in darkness, that leaves us unprepared for critical decision making in this nuclear age.

<u>Preservation of Ethnicity is a Survival of Whole Intelligence</u>

I believe unique intelligence <u>is</u> invested in human diversity. Tribal people living today in natural ecology still retain expansive intelligence, that has been lost to us by <u>specialization</u>. Indigenous wisdom and skills have been developed in a total environmental relationship. In contrast, modern brilliance masters <u>parts</u> with, often, no ogranic knowledge of the whole function. Is this because we believe we control nature and therefore no longer need to consider the organic context? This independence may be no more than arrogance, that blinds us to any ultimate man-in-nature disaster. But the people still surviving in the extremes of ecology, the bushman desert hunter or the Arctic whaleman, know that faulty, incomprehensive decision making can bring disaster and death.

Eskimos, in their arctic environment, must consider all nuances of technological and environmental circumstance in their decision making. Hence, for survival, the Eskimo must have general intelligence (in the St. Lawrence Islands, Eskimos will not put to sea without two outboard engines (Leighton)). The physicist developing the hydrogen bomb, by his very skills must have specialized intelligence, with possibly a general intelligence of a thirteen year old child. This promotes the classical response of Indians to white civilization. To quote Ishi, the last wild Californian Indian, "I find white man's inventions amusing and useful, but he is like a child." In return, white men observing the low material and technological development of some Indians, speak of the redman as colorful, brave and knowledgable in the ways of nature but with only the mind of a child. Let us try and get these two men together!

The survival and resurgence of ethnicity

The White world and its anthropologists have taken a fatalistic view of the disappearance of both tribalism and world ethnicity. "The world will all become the same" -- meaning, that the Westernization of the planet will become complete. There is little evidence that this is true! There are miscalculations in this ethnocentric view.

The first error is the belief that Euro-American technology will Westernize the world. But it is evident that you don't have to be a converted Christian to use and master advanced technology. In reverse, it has been high technology that has given power to many third world ethnic nations. A second error is that instant communication, exploitative mass media and advertising would influence underdeveloped nations to join the west! Communication and education is a two-edged experience. Certainly, aboriginal peoples have been overwhelmed by Western advertising and electronic communication but at the same time this contact may have also destroyed the myth of Western superiority. Media can be a two-way exchange which allows strangers to see us as we are. Communciation has brought isolated peoples worldly sophistication that affects assimilation with the West. Instant travel has brought thousands of non-Western peoples to America, both as students and business

travelers. Certainly, some are tempted to seek political asylum in America but as many return home wiser for their visit.

When we speak of fading ethnicity, we are speaking of assimilation which is the key process in fading diversity. Edward Spicer, who has written on ethnicity, has taken the view that true assimilation rarely happens. As illustration for his position, Spicer reviews ethnicity and assimilation in Europe. Here, Spicer observes, there has been significantly little or no assimilation. A case in point are the Catalonians and Basques of Spain. Their demands for a separate national identity are stronger than ever.

Both retention and resurgence of ethnicity suggest there are powerful needs to fulfill in retaining cultural systems and cultural identity. Spicer, a Weatherhead Scholar at the Navajo Community College, lectured to Indian students, "You do not have to worry about assimilation; what you need to consider is not whether you want to assimilate, but whether you want to become faceless or not by surrendering your Navajo identity." Ethnicity, retention of the first language, religious ceremonies and fulfillment can be the very structure of personality. It is true, that ethnicity is not simply a continuity, but the roots of culture upon which an identity rests. In the increasing invisibility of personal identity and the illness of loss of self and human continuity, ethnicity as a special identity of personality becomes increasingly important. This cultural hunger may not be expressed in the emigré from Mexico or Japan, for he can be swept by extrovert enthusiasm in settling in a new land, but often it is the third generation, the Isei Japanese , who turns backwards in search of her or his ethnicity. It was the third generation Japanese that formed the MazanorCommittee, that sponsored journies back to the Second World War concentration camps to honor and revive Japanese spirit. Surrounding Mazanor were four tribal Indian groups who observed the ceremony of the Japanese youth. They may not have understood the rites, but they responded to the symbolism; a few years ago they sent emissaries to the camp, suggesting that Indians had suffered equal persecution, and therefore, they should hold ceremonies together. The next year Indians and Japanese celebrated their ethnicity

together (Ron and Don Rundstrom, personal communication).

The following year Mexican Americans working near the camp also sent a representative. "We too have suffered by white exploitation. We should also join your ceremonies." And now the Japanese, Indians and Mexicans hold ethnic ceremonies together.

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